Fact sheet

Water in other cultures

For many cultures and religions water has a central place in their practices and beliefs. For example:

- Water cleanses
- Water heals and protects
- Without water there’s no life
- Water spirits or a life force
- Water and funeral rites, and
- Creation or destruction

Beliefs of some cultures and religions include:

**Hindu**

Water in Hinduism is important because it’s believed to have spiritually cleansing powers and all water is sacred, especially rivers. In particular the Ganges River, where its waters are used in worship and if possible a sip is given to the dying. It’s believed those who bathe in the Ganges and those who leave some part of themselves on the left bank will attain paradise.

**Aboriginal**

Spirituality for Aboriginal people is derived from a sense of belonging to and being part of: The land, the sea, and their Culture. Many Creation stories describe a snake or Rainbow Serpent (known by different names in different language groups) as the creator of rivers, streams and waterholes. These stories tell how the serpent moved across the land, carving the landscape with its long and powerful body.

**Balinese**

Water plays an important role in Balinese life and is an integral part of all ceremonies. The Balinese Hindu religion is called Agama Tirtha, the religion of holy water. Agama means ‘religion’ and ‘Tirtha means ‘holy’ or to ‘cleanse’. Balinese revere water for its mysterious potential, its power to make things grow, and as a medium for spiritual regeneration.

**Japanese**

Like many religions, Shinto worship always begins with an act of purification with water. Inside all shrines there are troughs for ritual hand washing. Waterfalls are held sacred and standing under them is believed to purify. Japanese Buddhists also follow Sulgyo (water practice) which is a similar type of water cleansing. Some Japanese also believe in water spirits/wizards/doctors, or Suijin who use special rainstones to bring rain. Some shrines are dedicated to rain or water gods.

**Chinese**

Feng Shui is an ancient Chinese art of particular placement of aspects of a home, and of items in it. This is to ensure a balanced life. It was originally used to choose burial sites for wealthy Chinese, and also to choose royal palace locations. Water is one of two components of Feng Shui, the other being wind (Feng means water, Shui means wind). Thus when water is placed in harmony with the wind, good fortune comes about in the form of wealth and prosperity. Water is another word for wealth – good water brings in money and bad water takes money away.

**Christian**

In most Christian religions water is symbolic of purity and cleansing. This is why holy water (water blessed by a priest or minister) is poured over the head during baptism. In this instance water cleanses the person of sin.